

High-handicappers affecting developments

'People just aren't going to buy into a golf course they can't play' — Kevin Downing

BY LARRY KIEFFER

Golf course development has entered a new era, says Kevin Downing, golf and landscape operations manager for a South Florida developer and a member of the USGA Green Section Committee.

And any developer who doesn't understand that the rules have changed may end up spending all his capital on the permit process or — worse — if he does get through permitting with his bankroll intact, "may not be able to sell his real estate because he builds more golf course (in difficulty) than his market can handle."

Downing, a last-minute substitute speaker at the annual USGA Green Section Florida Conference at JDM Country Club in Palm Beach Gardens in April, said, "If you build a golf course for the three-handicapper, you had better be prepared for a very long sell-out because there aren't that many three-handicappers walking around out there."

"With the kind of money you're talking about at today's upper-end country club community, people just aren't going to buy into a golf course they can't play."

Other speakers at the conference included golf course architects Pete and Alice Dye, golf course manager Tim Hiers and attorney Mike Veron, all members of the Green Section Committee. Also on the program were three professors from the University of Florida — Dr. Monica Elliott (fungicides), Dr. Bert McCarty (weed control) and Dr. John Cisar (potassium nutrition).

Downing described the evolution of Willoughby Golf Course in Stuart, Fla., a 600-acre development on sensitive wetlands (including some native habitat for the federally protected scrub jay) surrounded by commercial development and a major highway.

"It used to be vogue to design 'target golf courses,'" Downing said. "Now it's mandatory."

The company spent \$1.1 million on the permit process, drafting three completely different land-use plans before finally getting permission to turn the first shovelful of dirt.

Because of new requirements for upland buffers and special treatment of shoreland zones, the protected scrub jay habitat and the requirement of a local agency that 25 percent of the native vegetation be left untouched, Downing said the golf course had to be routed before the architect could be hired.

"Furthermore, we had done focus groups to make sure we knew what our potential market wanted in the way of a golf course community," Downing said. "They not only told us what kind of roof tile they preferred, they also told us that they wanted to look out on a green golf course and blue water."

"We also learned how much they were willing to spend on their club which, in turn, told us what the operating budget — including the golf course maintenance budget — would be for the next six years."

He said, "Finding an architect who was sensitive to environmental limits and who was willing to design a course with the vistas we felt our buyers would demand at a degree of difficulty we thought they could handle and which could be maintained for six years at \$550,000 to \$750,000 a year was not easy."

The group finally settled on Arthur Hills, who had designed the much acclaimed Bonita Bay project in Naples, Fla.

"And Art had to agree to tone down the contours on his greens — which is sort of

his signature — and do some other things to make the course playable for our average prospect: an 18-handicapper who hits a 180-yard slice," Downing said.

Other highlights of the seven-hour conference attended by 235 superintendents, architects, club managers and golf professionals from Florida and southern Georgia:

- "I can't find an engineer who says they will work, but they do," said Pete Dye while describing a system of "catch pockets" or "sump basins" that allows him to drain fairways that are constructed only a foot above the water table.

- When mixing chemicals, it should be done by the superintendent himself or by his assistant, said attorney Veron. "Keep a

log and always, always, always have a witness." He also said the label and a small sample of the mixture should be saved.

- "My goal," said course manager Hiers, "is to convince developers, owners, operators and architects to hire a qualified superintendent at the earliest possible stage in construction. "I'm not saying architects and contractors can't do their jobs, but the superintendent is the one who is going to stay there after everyone else is gone. He has a vested interest in making sure things are done right."

- "Give women the same playing conditions as men," said Alice Dye. "Give them a choice of tees. And never give the average lady a forced carry of more than 75 yards

over water. If she has 75 yards, she'll try an iron — five iron or nine iron, it doesn't make any difference since the average lady (not the good player) tends to hit all her irons the same distance — which gives her a better chance of getting the ball up." (See related stories on pages 14 and 15)

The meeting was moderated by F. Morgan "Buzz" Taylor, chairman of the USGA Green Section, and Roger Harvie, USGA regional affairs manager of the Southeast.

Larger facilities must be found for next year's meeting, officials said.

Larry Kieffer is a veteran golf writer who owns Janlark Communications, Inc. in Auburndale, Fla.

Bio-Groundskeeper® Benefits Go Deeper Than Thatch Reduction



"In the past...we have never had roots over four inches. Now, the roots on the greens and tees are eight inches or better."

Rich Riggs
Sentry World
Stevens Point, WI

Thatch reduction helps plants develop larger root systems which results in better water and fertilizer uptake and less plant stress.



For Thatch Reduction

KLM Bio-Systems, Inc.
10700 Normandale Blvd.,
Bloomington, MN 55437
1-612-884-4081
1-800-383-4081

For free information circle # 104

The best water management help for turf professionals

Viterra Gelscape

The consistent moisture available from **Gelscape** ensures faster germination and early establishment of turf, even on stressed areas. **Gelscape's** ability to re-release this moisture reduces irrigation frequency, while providing better survival of turf and plantings.

Reliable moisture for faster establishment and better survival.

Call or write for additional information:
1-800 832-8788

AGLUKON AGRI-PRODUCTS
A Division of MOR-AM Chemical Company
50 N. Harrison Ave., Congers, New York 10920 (914) 268-2122

For free information circle # 105

Clean water through windpower.

LAKE AID HAS THE ANSWER.

The Lake Aid Pond 1® is a small wind-powered deep circulator. Pulling water from the bottom of the pond to the surface where it can be oxygenated naturally, Lake Aid circulators have proven effective for over 8 years at preventing stratification, removing odors, reducing algae scum and preserving fish life, among many other benefits.

The Pond 1® was specially engineered for smaller ponds and lakes like those on a golf course. It requires no outside source of energy and virtually no maintenance. The advantages of clean water are well-known. The advantages of wind-power and low maintenance are obvious. For the name of your nearest dealer or distributor and a free brochure call (701) 222-8331.



LAKE AID SYSTEMS
LAKE AID, INC., Dept. GCN6
510 East Main Ave.
Bismarck, ND 58501, USA
701/222-8331

For free information circle # 103

Select territories available for qualified rep firms.